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- (1) Editorial: Bush's speech heavily touched on Japan's past

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)
August 25, 2007

People in power tend to interpret historical events to serve their own interests.

President Bush, too, seems to have cherry-picked some historical events in his speech delivered on August 22 at the Veterans of

Foreign Wars convention. He specifically cited World War II and the Vietnam War in an attempt to justify the Iraq war and underline the need to keep US troops there.

In the speech, President Bush said:

"The militarists of Japan and the communists in Korea and Vietnam were driven by a merciless vision for the proper ordering of humanity. . . . Some said Japanese culture was inherently incompatible with democracy. A lot of Japanese believed that democracy wouldn't work."

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States reminded many Americans of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and its strategy of suicide attacks. Bush is believed to have referred to Japan, knowing that ahead of launching the Iraq war, some in the US government had thought of Japan as a prime example of democracy that resulted from the use of force.

But it is absurd to view Iraq as an extension of the successful democratization of Japan in the postwar period. Japan had experienced the Freedom and People's Rights Movement in the Meiji Period (1868-1912) and the liberal movement in the Taisho Era (1912-1926). It was the popular will not to start a war again that prevented militarism from coming back to life in Japan, although it was also helped by the Occupation's democratization policy. Unlike Iraq, Japan was also free from a battle against the United States.

It is also too simplistic to think that America's withdrawal from Vietnam resulted in a large number of Vietnamese refugees and the Pol Pot massacres in Cambodia. How much did the Vietnamese people suffer because of the US intervention in the war? History ignores the fact that US bombings of Cambodia emboldened the Khmer Rouge as

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well.

One of the lessons we can learn from WWII and the Vietnam War regarding Iraq is that the future of a country should be left to the hands of the people of that country. After eliminating the war leaders, things were left to autonomy in Japan and Germany. Washington and Hanoi would not have been so close if it were not for the United States departure from Vietnam.

In any case, President Bush heavily referred to Japan in his speech, which went:

"There were critics who argued that democracy could not succeed in Japan because the national religion -- Shinto -- was too fanatical and rooted in the Emperor. Some said that that if we did not put the Emperor on trial, any steps we may take to create democracy are doomed to failure. Instead of abolishing the imperial throne, Americans and Japanese worked together to find a place for the Emperor in the democratic political system, and as a result, Japanese democracy grew stronger."

There is concern in the United States that the conservative trend in Japan, as seen in paying homage at Yasukuni Shrine and the so-called wartime comfort women issue, would lead to the justification of WWII and eventually prompt Japan to turn away from the United States. Was President Bush's speech also intended to apply pressure on a Japan that never faces up to its past?

President Bush and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe have indicated that the ties between Japan and the United States are based on common values. We would like to see the two leaders thoroughly discuss WWII from that perspective.

(2) Editorial: DPJ to be tested in its ability to make policy and to bring about a dissolution of the Lower House

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
August 24, 2007

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which was the leading force behind the trading of places between the ruling and opposition camps

in the House of Councillors' election, will reshuffle its "Next Cabinet" on Aug. 31. The largest opposition party will then be ready for the extraordinary Diet session to be convened on Sept. 10.

President Ichiro Ozawa has advocated the need for a two-party system, which enables changes of government. In order to have the two-party system take root, it is indispensable for the DPJ to win the next House of Representatives election. To that end, the party has to overcome two challenges: one is the capability of the DPJ to force Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to dissolve the Lower House under a situation where it would be possible to win the general election that would follow; and the other is the capability to formulate policy measures that can demonstrate its capability of assuming the political reigns.

While maintaining the triumvirate with Deputy President Naoto Kan, and Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama, Ozawa reportedly will reshuffle other key party portfolios. He will probably place emphasis on the Diet Affairs Committee, Policy Research Committee and Election Campaign Committee chairmen -- posts which are directly engaged in creating a "political situation," and "policy measures."

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It is now possible for the opposition bloc to pass censure motions against the cabinet and ministers in the Upper House. It is also easy for the opposition to exercise the right to investigate state affairs. The opposition can now call on the cabinet and public offices to submit reports and records, and it also can summon witnesses and un-sworn witnesses to testify before the Diet. If bills sponsored by opposition lawmakers are submitted first to the Upper House, they will be able to clear the Diet.

Censure motions submitted to the Upper House do not have the same legal foundation as those submitted to the Lower House. In 1998, however, a motion against then defense chief Fukushima Nukaga, who was pressed to take responsibility for the Defense Agency's Central Procurement Office's breach of trust scandal, was adopted. As a result, Nukaga was forced to quit his post. If a censure motion gets public support, it could have sufficient political power.

In a bid to indirectly support the war on terrorism in Afghanistan, Japan has dispatched Maritime Self-Defense vessels in the Indian Ocean based on the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law, which will expire on Nov. 1.

The DPJ has opposed the Antiterrorism Law from the start. In his meeting with US Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer, Ozawa repeated his opposition to the law. Characterizing the law as symbol of the Japan-US alliance, the government and ruling coalition strongly hope to extend it. In that case, the DPJ should display its counterproposals in accordance with the kind of Japan-US relations that the DPJ envisions. The DPJ's capabilities of "making policy measures" and "carrying out politics" will be tested for the first time.

Certain appointments must be approved by both houses of the Diet. The Diet has to approve appointments of the Board of Audit commissioners and of the NHK Compliance Committee members. Attention is especially being focused on the selection of successor to Bank of Japan Gov. Toshihiko Fukui, whose term in office will expire next March. The DPJ's basic position is that appointing a former bureaucrat as BOJ governor is a problem. If coordination between the government and ruling camp ends in failure, the government's work will fall into a jumble.

In the 1998 Upper House election, the LDP suffered a defeat and the opposition camp controlled the Upper House. Then DPJ President Naoto Kan did not take the tactic of forcing the prime minister to dissolve the Lower House for a general election, saying: "We will not link the financial problem to dissolving the Lower House." He lacked the ability to create a change in the political situation.

LDP Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa has called on the DPJ to form a grand alliance. However, the LDP and DPJ should wait for public opinion to weigh in first in the next Lower House election.

Creating tension in the political situation is the immediate duty of the DPJ, the largest opposition party, which is also on a path to obtaining the reins of government.

(3) Editorial: Economic partnership agreement; Concern about fate of agricultural policy

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)

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August 27, 2007

Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) reached a consensus on a framework of the signing of an economic partnership agreement (EPA). This is going to be the first time for Japan to sign an EPA with a regional association. The two parties are expected to reach a formal agreement in November and the pact will go into effect as early as next spring. The observation has been growing that Japan is lagging behind other countries in terms of signing free trade agreements (FTA). The agreement is apparently an opportunity for it to recover from the setback.

ASEAN is a region that serves as a linchpin in regional cooperation in East Asia. It has already signed an FTA with China and South Korea, while Japan has so far signed FTAs only on a bilateral basis with a few countries, such as Thailand and Malaysia. It is highly significant for Japan to sign an FTA with the ASEAN region as a whole.

Eliminating most trade tariffs will work favorably to the competitiveness of Japanese companies. Once Japan and ASEAN formally signs the EPA, Japanese companies will no longer have to pay tariffs that have been imposed each time their goods in trade crossed borders in the form of parts and semi-finished goods before they became end products.

Regarding flat-screen TV sets, over which Japanese manufacturers are engaging in fierce competition with South Korea manufacturers, Japanese companies will have the edge over foreign competitors when they export to ASEAN nations liquid crystal displays or plasma panels, key parts for such televisions, and fabricate end products there by procuring peripheral parts.

An EPA between Japan and ASEAN is important in creating a cooperative framework in East Asia. Japan uses the term EPA instead of FTA, because the envisaged pact targets broad areas, including not only the abolition of or cuts in tariffs but also services and investments.

It is necessary for Japan as an industrialized country to establish a high-quality relationship of cooperation with ASEAN. Signing an EPA with that regional entity will enable Japan to strengthen cooperation in human resources, including accepting trainees, while strengthening the contents of the pact, such as improving the investment environment and taking up intellectual property rights issues. Such a possibility will lead to enhancing Japan's presence in the process of establishing rules for the formation of an East Asia economic community.

Japan's foreign policy toward ASEAN has been to have it accept Japan's viewpoint by pledging aid and investment through bilateral talks. However, ASEAN now insists on involving the region as a whole, claiming that single-country negotiations are disadvantageous to ASEAN.

As it has become necessary for Japan to come up with drastic proposals, it has decided to remove tariffs amounting to 90 PERCENT of the value of imports from ASEAN once the pact takes effect. Probably as part of such a decision, it has extensively made concessions over the auto area, as can be seen in the agreement that five ASEAN countries, such as Thailand, exempted imports of finished cars from tariff abolition.

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The most difficult trade issue for Japan is how to handle agricultural goods. The agreement reached with ASEAN this time has exempted rice, sugar and dairy products from liberalization. EPA talks with Australia, a major agricultural goods exporter, have begun.

The government's agricultural policy can be one reason for the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) crushing defeat in the recent Upper House election. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), which has gained the largest number of seats in the election, is calling for setting up an individual income compensation system.

A fight over who would be eligible for such a system and what mechanism the envisaged system should have is expected to break out between the government and the ruling parties. Agricultural policy should not relapse into a transitory vote-catching policy.

(4) Tokyo protests Russian minister's inspection of Northern Territories, concerned about such being demonstration of Russia's effective control over controversial islands

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)
August 27, 2007

Russian Minister of Economic Development and Trade German Gref on August 8 inspected the Northern Territories, such as Kunashiri Island, sources revealed yesterday. Back in June, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov inspected Kunashiri and Shikotan Islands. In recent years the Russian government, backed by its business boom, has accelerated its efforts to develop the Far Eastern region. The Japanese government is becoming nervous about this move by Moscow, with one government official speculating: "There is a good possibility that Russian cabinet members will visit the Northern Territories more often than ever in order to demonstrate its effective control of them."

According to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, Gref, who has been tasked with improvement of social infrastructure in distant areas of Russia, has led a "social and economic development plan" to develop the Kurile Islands, including the disputed four Northern Islands.

Gref arrived in Kunashiri Island by airplane and inspected an electric power plant and other facilities and told officials concerned that he would speed up the pace of modernizing the airport and harbors. Gref also inspected Shikotan Island and the Habomai islets from the air.

Japan conveyed its concern via its embassy to Russia, saying that because of the territorial issue that is still going on between Japan and Russia, it was inappropriate for high-level government officials to visit the Northern Territories. However, there has reportedly been no response from Moscow.

(5) Iceland to suspend commercial whaling because of low prospects for sales to Japan

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
August 27, 2007

The Fisheries Ministry of Iceland has revealed as of Aug. 26 that it would provide no new catch quotas for commercial whaling, which it

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resumed last year for the first time in 21 years. As the reasons for the decision, the ministry cites little interest shown by clients in whale meat. A senior Icelandic ministry official told Reuters News Agency that it will be unprofitable even if the government releases catch quotas because no progress has been made in negotiations with Japan on sales of whale meat.

Iceland had suspended commercial whaling since 1985, but it resumed it last October, in response to complaints from fishermen, such voices as: "As a result of whales eating fishes, fish stocks are decreasing." Although it planned to catch nine fin whales and 30

minke whales by the end of this month for commercial purposes, Icelandic whalers actually hunted down only seven of each of the species.

A senior Icelandic ministry official commented: "The government of Iceland is still carrying out negotiations with the Japanese government on food-safety standards and export permission, but both have yet to reach a conclusion."

Only Norway and Iceland hunt whales for commercial purposes.

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